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INTERIM REPORT OF THE COMMISSION'S AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND EFFICIENCY

Prepared by the Ad Hoc Working Group

I. INTRODUCTION

1. For more than forty years the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was a unique instrument for economic dialogue and cooperation among its member countries, many of which had markedly different political and economic systems. In keeping with the important political and economic changes which have occurred in the region since 1990, the Commission and its Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) have been adapting their work programmes and their methods of work to the current requirements of the region, at the same time building on the knowledge base that has been acquired.

2. ECE is an open regional forum for discussion on economic issues, and is contributing to a climate of cooperation in Europe. It is an instrument for monitoring emerging trends and for generating statistics. The ECE initiates legal instruments, conventions and standards, some of which have a global impact. It assists countries in transition in the region through their transition process and integration into the European and world economy, with a series of demand driven workshops, advisory services and the development of programmes and projects.

3. During this period ECE and its PSBs have also worked at strengthening their relationships with other intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations through a network of contacts.

4. The reform of the ECE is in progress, and involves an in-depth review of the Commission and its PSBs, which ECE member Governments initiated within the last 12 months by adopting Commission decisions A (50) and 1 (1995-S).

5. This interim report provides an overview of the work that has been done since September 1995 as follow-up to the above decisions.

II. FOLLOW-UP WORK CONDUCTED IN THE PERIOD SEPTEMBER 1995-MARCH 1996

6. The Ad Hoc Working Group has met on four occasions during this period. At its first meeting (13 October 1995) the Working Group was informed of the questionnaire that the Bureau of the Commission planned to send to Chairpersons of the ECE Principal Subsidiary Bodies. At its second meeting (6 November 1995) it decided that it should also use a questionnaire addressed to ECE Governments through Geneva Missions as the means of obtaining feedback from ECE Governments on their views in the review process. At that meeting the Working Group also had a preliminary discussion of how member Governments see the provisions of para.(d) of decision 1 (1995-S) 1/ being implemented, and of the tentative timing schedule that would need to be taken into account in the review process. At its third meeting (11 December 1995) the Working Group agreed on the form, content and structure of the questionnaire that it decided should be used to consult Governments in the review process. The basic data for the questionnaire relating to the PSBs' programme elements were elaborated by the ECE secretariat. The questionnaire comprised two sections: the first, several questions of a general character asking the views of Governments on current and future activities of the ECE; the second, a detailed assessment of the ECE's programme of work. The questionnaire was sent to Governments on 22 January 1996 and they were requested to respond to it by 15 April 1996. The Working Group will take these responses into account in its future work on implementing the different provisions of decision 1 (1995-S).

7. The Bureau of the Commission also wanted to make a contribution to this review, and therefore it decided to prepare under its own initiative a questionnaire for distribution to the Bureaux of all ECE Principal Subsidiary Bodies and related bodies reporting directly to the Commission, as possible input to the review. This questionnaire was sent to the Chairpersons of these bodies on 1 November 1995. Responses have been received from all 16 Chairs, and sent to all member countries. In addition, a synthesis of them has been prepared by the secretariat and the Bureau and distributed to all ECE Governments, together with some preliminary conclusions which could be drawn from them. The contribution of the Bureau will also be taken into account by the Ad Hoc Working Group while conducting its review.

8. At its fourth meeting (22 March 1996), the Working Group agreed on the content and structure of this interim report.

1/ The operative part of Commission decision 1 (1995-S) and para.(d) of that decision reads as follows: "(In order to define these strategic directions, the ad hoc Working Group should, in consultation with the subsidiary bodies where appropriate,...) evaluate the cost effectiveness of the Commission's work with the view to preparing proposals on efficiency savings to be considered at an ad hoc meeting of the Commission". (This ad hoc meeting of the Commission has not yet been held).